

February 20, 1987

Russ Cochran

Dear Brother EC-Fan-Addict:

Yep, it's another one of "those" newsletters. You know the type if you are an old customer of mine. It's the same old White Rabbit Russ, running around, chasing his tail, saying, "I'm late, I'm late, for a very important date!" Right here, up front on page one, I'll give you the gut-wrenching news that Volumes 3 and 4 of MAD and the two New Direction sets are late (you already knew that) and not even very close to being completed.

There are lots of reasons for this, including the fact that my decision to do MAD in full color was an "eleventh hour" decision, and there have been many delays in the color work. Chemical Color Plate, where all the EC color work has been done, lost several of their veteran colorists, and then lost their Number One man, Ed Whitbread, who kept the work rolling through there at a steady pace. In December, 1985, I made the decision to do MAD in full color, and was told by Ed that they could probably turn out the color separations for MAD at the rate of one issue per week. That would mean that the 23 issues of MAD should have taken about six months to complete the color work...but now, over a year later, only 16 of the 23 issues are finished.

The people at Chemical can only take part of the blame, because another big factor is this: The original artwork for the New Trend EC comics has been stored in Bill Gaines' Vault for the last thirty-odd years, and is in near-perfect condition. But the original artwork for MAD comics #1-23 has been kept in the MAD offices for all this time, not in Bill's Vault, because they needed the art frequently for reprinting things in MAD SPECIALS. Because of this, and of course MAD has moved its own office a couple of times, some of the early MAD art was lost or stolen, or is mis-filed and cannot be located. The cover of MAD #8 is an example of an important piece of art which is missing and presumed lost or stolen. We are doing our best to reconstruct the missing art as we go, and are still working on some of it.

Yet another reason is that we recently relocated our main business office to another building several blocks away from the Zorn Building, which is still my office, and this move has cost us some time. Having too much to do and too little time, we had to put priorities on everything, and things like filling daily orders, working on the EC Classics, and getting out the regular Comic Art Auctions have been higher-up on the priorities list than working on MAD and New Direction.

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So, while we have most of the work done on the negatives for these books, the annotations are running behind schedule with the color separating. So, you say, what else is new?

My well-deserved reputation among my customers is that I am often late with my publications (Volume Three of The Edgar Rice Burroughs Library of Illustration was only seven years late!) , BUT, once they finally did get published, they were right. I have always told you that I'd much rather be late with a book than to rush it and meet the deadline, but screw up the book somehow.

I am a fanatic on that subject. I figure that these EC Library sets and my ERBLOI set will still be around and people will be reading them and buying and selling them 100 or 200 years from now. After everyone reading this is dead and gone, these books will live on, and to me, my books are a little chunk of immortality...as long as these books are around, a little piece of Bill Gaines, Al Feldstein, and all the EC artists...yes, and even a little bit of Russ Cochran...still lives, in a way.

And while all of the above statements are true and are, to me, valid reasons for continually being late, there is now another factor which is overshadowing all those good reasons. That factor is me. I am going through the middle-age-crazies, looking at my life and what I have done with it so far. I will be 50 years old in July, which is doing a heavy-duty number on my head right now. It is affecting me mentally and emotionally, and makes it harder for me to do the things that are necessary to keep the Big Ball rolling, as my buddy James Taylor would say. I am a big fan of his, and in his latest album, "That's Why I'm Here", James has figured out why he is here, on this planet. James has got me to thinking a lot about why old Russ is here. The answers are many and complex, but a part of it that you will appreciate is that one of the reasons that I am here is to help you remember the way you were back in those innocent days when you were playing cowboys and reading comic books and seeing Johnny Weissmuller Tarzan movies. I am here to bring you a few moments of quiet joy as you try to touch base with that little child that is still in all of us, no matter how hard we have worked to grow up and ignore that little child. I am performing this service for several thousand people, mostly guys around my own age, and this is an important mission for me and I will not allow myself to screw it up, no matter how late it makes my publications.

Recently I have been receiving letters and phone calls, some angry ones, from the "new guys" on my mailing list, complaining about the lateness of MAD and New Direction, some threatening to "report me" to the Postal authorities, the Better Business Bureau, etc. I say "new guys", because all of you old farts that have been on my EC train for years know that I always deliver, and I always deliver a highest-quality product, no matter how late it is, and you don't bug me when I'm late, like I am now. The color MAD attracted quite a few of these "new guys" to my mailing list, and MAD Volumes 1 and 2 are the first books these guys have bought from me, and they haven't learned to be patient with me.

So, once again, for all you "new guys": A pre-publication offer is a sort of a contract between you and me that if I will sell you the book at a lower price, you will agree to wait patiently until

I finally get the book done, no matter how long it takes. If you are impatient and can't wait, then please do not take me up on these pre-pub offers, just wait until the book is finally out and then buy it at the retail price.

If you are disgusted with me for being late, just write and ask for a refund, which I will send you by return mail. Please do not start filing complaints with the Post Office, BBB, etc., as that only causes me a lot of red-tape trouble, which I don't need. I'd much prefer to just refund your money.

I am not going to announce any revised publication dates for MAD 3 and 4 and New Direction, because there are too many variables beyond my control. They will come when they come, and when they do, they will be right, and I can then be proud of them. I'm pedalling my EC bike as fast as I can right now, and your complaints only slow me down more. If you can be patient with me and hang in there, that's great and I will love you for it. If you can't, that's OK too...just ask for a refund.

You guys (don't take offense, gals!) are all like an extended family to me. This is the most personal newsletter I have ever written, and to make it even more personal, I am including a couple of old photos that you might enjoy. (See last page)

I would like some feedback on these photos. Do you enjoy this kind of thing? Should I expand this idea by asking you to send me your pictures of yourselves as kids? I could use them in future newsletters, or maybe there is even a book in this idea. I am looking for photographs taken in the 1940s and 1950s, with you in your favorite cowboy outfit, or reading your comic books, or maybe even that photo you had taken with Smiley Burnette when he passed through your home town doing personal appearances when you were a kid. Especially, if you have photos of yourself reading or holding an EC comic!...send it to me, put your name and address on the back of the photo and I will personally see to it that it is returned to you after we have copied it. How do you like this idea?

There is only one new item on the enclosed order blank, and that is Hank Harrison's new book, The Art of Jack Davis, to be published in May by Stabur Graphics in three separate editions, as fully described in the enclosed flyer. There is the \$35. deluxe slipcased, signed and numbered collector's edition, and I will be getting at least 90 of the first 100 numbers of this edition, so the earlier you order this one, the lower your number will be. There is also a \$19. unsigned and un-slipcased hardcover edition, and a \$10. trade paperback edition. I love Jack's art so much, I will be carrying all three editions, but the \$35. collector's edition will sell out and not be reprinted, whereas the other two editions will probably be kept in print and not have much "secondary market" value in the future.

To my EC brothers and sisters, I send my heartfelt thanks for your support so far, for allowing me to publish these great books

that will outlive us all and preserve the glory of EC and the very important childhood memories that we all share. I'm just gonna hang in there and ride this one out, brothers and sisters, and I hope you will "hang in" with me and continue to keep those letters and orders coming in.

Your old EC Buddy,

Russ



The photo on the left shows me in 1943, during my "cowboy phase". It was taken in my back yard in West Plains, riding my faithful "horse". Our next-door neighbor had thrown an old beat-up saddle in the trash, and my wonderful dad got it for me, put a 2x6 in the fork of a small cherry tree in the back yard, and made me this "horse", which I rode for hours at a time. If you will look closely you can see my brand-new Hubley "Texan" cap pistol (white-handled version I must have shot at least a thousand bad guys with that pistol while "riding the range" in that saddle.

The other photo was taken ten years later in 1953, after I had shot up tall and skinny to about 6' 2" and was taking up archery and terrorizing the neighborhood squirrels and birds. This is the Russ Cochran who was buying and reading EC comics in 1953.

Send me your photos!

THE ART OF JACK DAVIS!



THE ART OF JACK DAVIS

By HANK HARRISON

The Art Of Jack Davis Is A Major Art Publication For Novice Or Experienced Collectors And All Lovers Of Illustrative Humor Art.

As a practical guide, this book is a must for Jack Davis's fans and collectors. As a tribute to a great American artist, this book will enhance any library and is an ideal gift for anyone who enjoys illustrated humor art.

The author, Hank Harrison, worked closely with Jack Davis to research Davis's career and to locate for publication memorable milestones from early published art to work for "Esquire", "Life", "Mad Magazine", "Playboy", "TV Guide" and respected trade advertising work.

... About Jack Davis:

An Atlanta, Georgia native, Jack Davis migrated to the North after art studies at the University of Georgia. He finished his studies in New York at the Art Students League, where his love of comic art illustration soon developed into his trademark style.

"I guess I did a million bubble gum cards and countless odd drawings for anybody brave enough to print my work." Dues paid, it's been a remarkable art career for Jack Davis from comics, cards, posters, children's books, games and other packaging art to magazines and the Fortune 500 via some of the world's largest advertising agencies. Through it all, he's kept his unmistakable sense of humor.

... About Hank Harrison:

Hank Harrison is a former art director and now directs the design of exhibits for the Witte Museum in San Antonio, Texas.

From a family of commercial artists, Harrison has been a fan and an active collector of Jack Davis for 25 years. "I have admired his unique style ever since my father brought home a copy of Homer and Jethro's "Life Can Be Miserable". That was about 1960 and I was 8 years old. Over the years my personal collection grew. I kept hoping to find a book that covered Jack's career, but I never found it." The art world and Davis's fans and collectors everywhere are grateful for Hank Harrison's efforts.

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